

VZCZCXRO4040
PP RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHNP RUEHROV RUEHSL RUEHSR
DE RUEHBM #0104/01 0570843
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 260843Z FEB 10
FM AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0349
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BUCHAREST 000104

SIPDIS

STATE EUR/CE FOR ASCHEIBE AND EUR/OHI CKENNEDY

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/25/2020

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [RO](#)

SUBJECT: ROMANIA'S FAR RIGHT: DOWN, BUT NOT DEAD

Classified By: DCM JERI GUTHRIE-CORN FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) and (D)

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

¶1. (C) In separate interviews, Romanian political analysts, government officials and former supporters of the far right largely dismissed Romania's ultra-nationalist movement as politically irrelevant. The far right is divided between the Greater Romanian Party (PRM) and New Generation Party (PNG), with the shadowy Noua Dreapta (New Right) group largely operating underground and on the Internet. The movement's electoral decline is a result of internal divisions, ineffective, aged leaders unwilling to groom younger protgs, the lack of a unifying threat as a rally point, the absorption of many supporters by the mainstream center-right, and a younger generation more focused on materialism than on nationalism or ideology.

ELECTORAL MALAISE

¶2. (C) In the November 2009 presidential elections, the two far-right candidates, Vadim Tudor (PRM) and Gigi Becali (PNG), failed to capitalize on discontent generated by the economic recession and the widely-held view that mainstream Romanian politicians are corrupt, cynical and ineffective. Tudor won only 5.5 percent of the popular vote, down from 12.6 percent in the 2004 presidential elections and far off his peak of 28.3 percent in the second round of the 2000 contest. Becali's 1.9 percent showing was disappointing (to him) in light of his June 2009 election to the European Parliament (EP) on a joint slate with PRM that garnered 8.6 percent of the vote. According to William Branza, a Liberal Democrat (PDL) member of Parliament who defected from PRM, Becali's June performance was due mainly to voter sympathy following his arrest and imprisonment in connection with a kidnapping scheme.

UNSTABLE, INEFFECTIVE AND AUTOCRATIC LEADERS

¶3. (C) One historian who studies the far right believes many Romanian ultra-nationalists view Tudor and Becali increasingly as liabilities. Tudor is suffering from worsening diabetes and younger ultra-conservatives consider him a clown. A former close friend and aide to Becali described the PNG leader as an intelligent but unsophisticated man who rejects advice and bullies his advisors to the point that no one can stand working for him for long. Neither Tudor nor Becali has been effective in building alliances with other mainstream parties, and neither has chosen to groom younger leaders as their successors. Branza, the PRM defector, holds Tudor and Becali responsible for the right wing's poor performance in the November presidential elections.

¶4. (C) Morale problems may be percolating downward. "Good, young people remain in the PRM, and they are frustrated by the lack of upward mobility in the party," Branza told us. PRM-affiliated newspapers have declined in circulation; local

PRM branches that used to buy bulk copies of Tudor's papers to distribute among their faithful can now barely pay their electric bills. As a result, publication is dependent upon a few loyal businessmen. The PNG, meanwhile, is dependent on the fortunes of Becali and his nationally-known soccer team - the source of much of his appeal.

NO UNIFYING THREAT

15. (C) Romanian ultra-nationalists currently lack a unifying ethnic enemy as a catalyst. Romania's Roma community remains politically and economically weak. Attempts to scapegoat ethnic Hungarians are falling on deaf ears, as most Romanians recognize that the economic competition with the ethnic Hungarians is no longer relevant with both Romania and Hungary in the EU and Romanians able to work abroad. Mainstream discrimination against Romania's tiny Jewish community -- and larger Arab student and immigrant community -- remain relatively limited. Our interlocutors thought that corruption was the most likely target for ultranationalist ire. Vadim Tudor's daily tabloid Tricolor has taken this approach, regularly ranting against the behavior of Romania's political class.

FORMER RIGHT-WINGERS JUMP TO MAINSTREAM PARTIES

16. (C) Meanwhile mainstream parties are courting far-right voters and disaffected politicians. Last year, Social Democratic Party (PSD) presidential candidate Mircea Geoana appeared with Tudor on the campaign trail and publicly praised him. Tudor reportedly told his supporters to vote for Geoana in the second round of the 2009 Presidential race,

BUCHAREST 00000104 002 OF 002

but most PRM supporters voted for incumbent President Basescu because he was perceived as more nationalistic, another observer of the far-right explained. Basescu covets these votes; in October, while he presided over the historic dedication of the Bucharest Holocaust Memorial, Basescu judged it politically expedient to delay installing a plaque explicitly expressing state complicity in the Holocaust (complicity he acknowledged openly at the dedication) until the day after the Presidential runoff.

17. (C) Conversely, some politicians use the PRM as a vehicle to forward their political ambitions. Branza, for example, entered Parliament with the PRM and then switched to the larger, more influential center-right Liberal Democrats (PDL) because, he intimated, he wanted to join a winner. By our estimates, approximately ten current PDL and National Liberal (PNL) members of Parliament were at one time associated with the PRM or far-right movements. The mainstream parties, in need of numbers, usually welcome the defectors with open arms.

YOUTH LESS VULNERABLE TO ULTRA-NATIONALISM

18. (C) With Internet penetration and EU membership established facets of Romanian life, most Romanian youth are too individualistic and career-oriented to fall under the influence of ultra-nationalist leaders, the history professor surmised. An exception may be members of the New Right, who, while circumspect in their public activities, are known to use the Internet to seek recruits. All of our interlocutors agreed that youthful recruits were more likely to come from urban areas than rural locales, where family and social networks are stronger. Young members were not limited to those who suffered after the transition to democracy -- in fact, most of them have no recollection of life under communism. Statistics are sketchy at best, and no one can offer an educated guess of the number of far-right sympathizers in Romania.

COMMENT

19. (C) Although the decline of the far right is a welcome

development, it is premature to sound the death knell. Romanian society is still plagued by widespread discrimination against Roma and less-frequent slurs against ethnic Hungarians and Jews. Nevertheless, short of the emergence of a still-unknown demagogue, we do not foresee the far right rejuvenating in the near future. For now, the best opportunity for the far right to win more adherents is to capitalize on Romanians' widespread disdain with their corrupt political class -- but even that may result in disaffected voters merely staying home instead of throwing their support to the PRM or PNG.

GITENSTEIN